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ABSTRACT

The culturally different child has traditionally been characterized as belonging both to a low socioeconomic status and to a racial minority group. The culturally different child is also characterized by a poor self concept and a slower rate of learning. These characterizations can be traced to the differences in environment that the child experiences at home, and the typical middle class oriented school environment. In order to rectify this situation, an organized, well-defined approach to behavior change must be undertaken. Teachers must be able to understand and work with related traits specific to each child classified as culturally different and must give consideration to the child's relationship to the curriculum. Goals that teachers establish must also be realistic. Strategies which seem most successful with the culturally different include a language experience approach to teaching the total language arts, peer tutoring, real life experiences such as field trips, and films. (Author/EB)

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A FIVE STEP MODEL FOR TEACHING AND WORKING WITH CULTURALLY DIFFERENT CHILDREN

by

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The rise of Sputnik in the late 1950's saw considerable attention in the public schools quickly directed toward the areas of science and mathematics instruction. This concentration had the immediate result of rapid curriculum innovation and classroom development focused on a logical and somewhat analytical teaching approach in these two disciplines. As a result of such great attention being given to the fields of mathematics and science, the uniqueness and individuality of each pupil often went unnoticed. However, by the mid-1960's this oversight was no longer apparent. At that time the American public, while admittedly still much atuned to a post-Sputnik philosophy (i.e., the belief that the survival of America depended upon the advancement of knowledge in technical areas), discovered the poor, the down and out, the "disadvantaged."

As this group of obviously "special" persons became legitimately identified, many labels were created in reference to them. The terms "culturally deprived", "culturally disadvantaged", and "culturally different" all enjoyed strong support. While labels sometimes prove to be helpful, this label proliferation is unfortunate as some labels generate perhaps more negative connotations than others leading to a fabrication of undesirable stereotypes. It is this kind of stereotypical thought that forces one individual to develop a negative attitude or mind set toward another; such has been an all too common occurance in the history of human interaction. The culturally deprived reference is perhaps the least acceptable of the three. Besides being a nonsensical phrase,

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each individual does belong to something that may properly be called a culture, being referred to as having no culture explodes many fantasies in a negative non-productive direction. While the individual referred to here is indeed disadvantaged in many respects, and his culture does play a major role in the perpetuation of this condition, the culturally disadvantaged label has been overworked and too often missused. Although certainly not connotation free, the term culturally different has been selected for use in this paper. Those individuals who fall into this group, disadvantaged to some degree as they may be, create critical problematic circumstances for educators and ultimately society in general.

It is the intent of this paper to (1) identify those individuals who may correctly be referred to as culturally different, (2) discuss how the culturally different child, due to his general make-up, is hampered in his educational efforts, and (3) offer a systematic model for working with this child directed toward behavior change which could greatly add to this individual's success in school.

THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT CHILD

The culturally different child has traditonally been characterized as belonging both to a low socio-economic status and racial minority group. While by many descriptive standards these traits are often related to the culturally different individual, too many other characteristics come into play to make these few descriptors reliable in their own right. Many other factors are significantly related to the overall profile of the culturally different child.

The individual properly identified as culturally different is commonly characterized by a poor self-concept. This feature is manifested in a poor

estimate of self, a lack of confidence in school, and an overall fear of failure which often leads to a fear of even attempting academic tasks. He predicts early that a lack of success will be the end result of any effort on his part. Too, from past experience success can be referred to both in terms of academic achievement and social relationships. Rejection, ridicule, and personal attack all too often face the culturally different child in and out of school. As this individual is a reality in the public school arena, a thorough understanding of the relatedness of his personal characteristics and school adjustment, both socially and academically, is crucial.

Most culturally different children seem to be discontent with school and enter school from homelives with little or no educational tradition. There is quite often a type of anti-intellectualistic outlook in the home with a growing antagonism toward both school and teachers. The culturally different child in many instances is victimized by varied forms of overt discrimination in the form of poor facilities, larger classes, and weaker teachers in schools with a higher teacher turnover. This individual is powerfully effected by many forms of subtle often unintentional kinds of discrimination, for example, patronizing or condescending attitudes on the part of teachers, lower expectations, and the impact of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is important to realize that whether originating in or out of the school environment, the culturally different child is also characterized by a slower rate of learning. This is in no way a reflection upon his basic intellectual potential. It is to say, however, that due to a variety of influences, (e.g., little concern for education, a feeling of being out of place when coming in contact with the dominant culture which is represented by the school, and a value system which makes interpersonal relationships with others

difficult) only to name a few, the culturally different child enjoys little success in the typical middle-class oriented school environment.

From investigations of the home background of the culturally different child one sees an environment complete with shattered family life, crowded often fatherless homes, frequent moves, noise, and an inadequate diet and poor health. Such a setting is not typical of the basic American cultural profile. Again, a future with culture clash is predictable. The culturally different child is generally depressed when relating his home to the "standard" home of his classmates. Frequently, he has little stimulation intellectually and is unable to model any positive parental influence. Because his home is often crowded, he vies for attention and learns how to receive it in an improper manner. Due to the instability of the home, characterized by relocation, the development of meaningful and lasting positive relationships is difficult. Generally reflected by the fact that there is a low family income, often resulting from the absence of a central breadwinning figure, the culturally different child does not eat nutritious foods and exhibits poor health and health habits.

Without question a major link between these children's cultural differences and their academic problems is language. This is obvious in the case of the child who is non-English speaking or the bilingual child, but major language differences have also been observed between children of middle and lower socio-economic status groups even when English is the only language they speak. It is crucial for the teacher to understand that it is not the differences in either grammatical usage or vocabulary which act as the serious "roadblocks" to learning. It is the lack of opportunity to develop the syntax of standard English which causes the culturally different child many learning difficulties (Hunt, 1964).

Language differences take place in what Bernstein (1968) calls language codes. The culturally different child uses what may be referred to as a restricted code. This restricted code is characterized by the use of as few words as possible to convey meaning. Restricted codes are used by all of us at times, but due to family size and the common conditions that families of the low socio-economic status groups share, restricted codes are used almost exclusively of more elaborate ones.

All families have some restricted codes; for example, a given group of playing children are told by their mother that "Father is sleeping." These children immediately stop playing and quickly go outside to finish their game because they have learned that their father often works at night and must not be disturbed during the day while he is sleeping. In other words, in this given household, the phrase "Father is sleeping" actually encompasses a much more complex set of interrelated ideas (i.e., Your father must work at night to help support his family; therefore, we must respect his right to sleep during the day. As a result, we cannot play noisy games inside while he is asleep. So, please finish your game somewhere else).

Due to the large number of children common to many culturally different families, young children often communicate with parents through older siblings (usually an older sister). A premium is often placed on the use of as few words as possible. Also, people of low socio-economic status tend to find that they have many of the same things in common due to poverty and a lack of opportunity. Because of such commonalities, a unity or bond is formed between the families of the culturally different. As a result of this "oneness," a restricted code is developed in order to communicate with peers which is not understood by "outsiders" (The school to these individuals is indeed the

outside world). For an example, one can observe the street talk common to American ghettos.

Deutsch (1965) has pointed out that the child from a culturally different background when entering school soon learns that his language is different and is made to feel inferior. This, of course, leads to a hesitancy to communicate on his part. It is the inability to use an elaborate language code that makes socialization and learning very difficult; therefore, the pupil looses interest and motivation. And as a result, a negativeness becomes associated with minority status through schooling.

The child from a culturally different background is apt to go to a school where the teacher gives directions in a language that is very different from the one he uses in his home. The teacher will try to manage his behavior by using a system of elaborate reasoning which is very foreign to him. Finally, he will be asked to express answers to questions in a way that, for him, is impossible. In fact, his language is not conducive to the type of thought which produces the kind of concept formation and problem solving that most schools require.

Related to the differences in language across cultural groups is an obvious difference in the environmental determiners of mental development as seen by Piaget (Pulaski, 1971). Piaget points out that four major factors control mental development: experiential background, maturation, social transmission (i.e., interaction), and equilibration which is the way the child assimilates new information into old information or the way he accomodates old concepts to make new information fit.

The experiences that a child has must be varied and well internalized if they are to aid mental development. We know, for example, that the parents

of middle-class children tend to watch programs like SESAME STREET with their children and interact with them during and after the viewing in order to help assist the internalization of concepts presented (Warren, 1976). Due to the large number of children in many lower class families as well as the lack of understanding that many low socio-economic status families have concerning the importance of learning in the home, children from culturally different backgrounds tend to get far fewer of these rich instances of educational experiences intermingled with one-to-one interaction with an adult.

The middle-class child who has gone to the zoo, flown in an airplane, spent the night in motels while on vacation trips, gone to movies, seen mountains and oceans, as well as had a myriad of other rich experiences before the first year of school is much more ready to learn than the child whose world revolves around a single rural site or a couple of city blocks. The child who is lacking in such experiences may be characterized by an inability to solve problems and to concentrate on more than one characteristic of an object at a time. For example, such a child may find it difficult to keep track of the fact that a ball is both round and red. Simply put, due to his paucity of experience and lack of needed social interaction, the child has failed to pass from the level of mental development that Piaget calls pre-operational.

The child's social milieu will often act as a good predictor of academic success. The public school is oriented toward those experiences which are common to the middle socio-economic status child while being foreign to those of the low socio-economic status pupil. The child will be positively reinforced for expressing his ideas in an elaborate way; it is the child who uses many words to express himself that will please the teacher. Often the

culturally different child knows the information but cannot express it in the proper code; therefore, he goes through school without being correctly understood by his teachers. Some children from culturally different backgrounds appear to be hopelessly dull, however, their problem does not stem from lack of intellectual potential, but from a lack of communication skills in conjunction with slow mental development resulting from an environment offering less than adequate stimulation. Such a child may have the potential to be a very well educated adult, but is likely to drop out of school because of the problems he faces which are for the most part due to the schools' inability to remediate his problems before they become insurmountable. However, remediating such problems is certainly not easy; most teachers have far too many pupils in their classrooms to properly individualize instruction. Moreover, many teachers are searching for a workable solution to management and scheduling problems they must face when attempting to give the remedial pupil the one-to-one attention that he needs. The final section of this article will present a workable solution to some of these problems.

In conclusion, the problems faced by that child referred to as culturally different are an outgrowth of a situation of conflict which develops as a result of the child's culture coming into contact with the culture of the school. Those value systems operating away from the school environment, and which the child is surrounded by daily, generally seem to be significantly different from those found in most public school settings. If we consider the theory that an individual's overall make-up is a direct result of cultural influences, we must recognize that the school age child's general presence, value and intellectual development combined, will be either similar or perhaps dissimilar to that found at school. Unfortuantely, one feature of the education profession is that opposites do not seem to attract. In having a middle-class mind

set, which is what is apparent in most public school teachers, teachers seem to find rewards in working with students whose values reinforce their own. Upon encountering culturally different children whose values are different, they attempt to measure progress by middle-class standards. Such teachers often perceive a disadvantaged youngster as not being enculturated rather than being enculturated differently. Holding this perception, teachers then encourage culturally different children to succeed on middle-class terms, in effect, teaching them that their own values and behaviors are wrong. In all too many public school settings, to win the favor of their teachers and thus receive the rewards of school which only come from middle-class conformity, culturally different children must give up both their individuality and accumstomed life style.

A FIVE STEP MODEL FOR SYSTEMATICALLY WORKING WITH THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT CHILD

To be successful any approach to behavior change must be organized systematically and well defined. In order to effect desired change, all parties involved must clearly understand expected responsibilities and stated roles. Too, the procedure must be systematized so that what does prove to be successful will be clearly identifiable and that which does not work will not be repeated thus wasting time and energy. The following approach suggested for working with the culturally different child is both systematic and defined according to direction and intent. If followed, the classroom teacher will be able to clearly see progress desired providing strategies and students have been properly matched.

I. IDENTIFICATION

The first of five basic steps to follow when working with the culturally

different child is identification. Such identification can be formally done with the preparation of case studies and the administering of standardized tests or somewhat more informally completed through systematic and diagnostic observation. The identification step is crucial in that the proper identification of the child is highly related to later success in working with that individual in the classroom. All too often children are mislabeled with little real understanding of true and relevant characteristics conrected with classroom learning. It is generally accepted that different types of individuals are motivated by different stimuli. If the culturally different child does indeed exist, and there is currently little doubt that he does, a teacher's success with that individual hinges greatly on that teacher's ability to properly understand and work with related traits specific to each and every child so classified.

II. CHILD-CURRICULUM JUXTAPOSITION

In Step Two the teacher must give serious consideration to the child's present relationship with the curriculum. While there exists an accepted "profile" of the culturally different child, each child is still uniquely an individual in and of his own right. As this is the case, the teacher should remain cognizant of the fact that some culturally different children will do better in school than others, and in different curriculum areas, even though all may be properly referred to as culturally different.

The classroom teacher must formally assess the child's progress toward the successful attainment of both cognitive and affective classroom goals. This of course implies that the teacher will have basic stated objectives that are hopefully to be reached by all or most students. The teacher must

at some point make this child-to-goals comparison and see which goals have been reached and which have not. Too, the teacher might consider which goals seem more possible than others; those goals which will provide the most immediate reward should perhaps be given special attention.

III. A FORMAL WEIGHTING OF GOALS

In all reality, one must assume that the culturally different child is academically behind in school, when compared to his age/class mates. Because of this, it is important for the teacher to no longer attempt to maintain the same standards of success for the culturally different child as for the average child in the classroom. What we know about the culturally different individual indicates that this type of child does indeed have bona fide differences that make him separate from the average child in the typical public school classroom and thus separate from the average public school curriculum. This should not be construed to mean that the teacher needs to lower his/her standards. The teacher should, however, be quite specific in setting goals for the culturally different child and evaluate the child's progress in relation primarily to these individualized objectives. The teacher must select goals for the culturally different child, as should be done for each child in the classroom, that incorporate both cognitive and affective achievements. For example, the teacher might choose to concentrate solely in helping the child develop an "interest" in books, courtesy in the classroom, cooperation with others, or mastering the skills of addition. The deficiencies of the culturally different student cannot be attacked on all fronts. Priorities must be selected. This does not mean that while in the class the culturally different child will be engaged in only one or two areas of concentration. It does indicate that the teacher needs to select a few specific areas such as those mentioned above and give serious attention to them.

IV. DESIGN A PROGRAM

After specific goals have been matched to each child in the classroom, the teacher needs to again look at each individual pupil to develop child-specific instructional strategies for each goal per child. The teacher will benefit from developing a strategy/progress notebook for this main purpose. Each child should have a formal section in the notebook where the teacher can daily follow the child's progress.

In Step Four the teacher should develop strategies to assist the child in a few selected areas. For example, strategies might be developed specifically to help the child learn to be more cooperative in the classroom or to develop an "interest" in books. Along with the strategies, the teacher should prepare a formal Progress Chart to assist in monitoring the child's advancement. The Progress Chart will allow the teacher to observe systematically the implementation of the strategy and provide an estimated amount of time to allow the strategy to be utilized. It is common to expect the appropriate strategy to be a difficult one to locate. What may be successful for one student may not work with another. Much of the procedure is of a trial and error nature, as it often is with any child.

V. FINAL ASSESSMENT

In Step Five the teacher formally assesses the completion, successful or otherwise, of the strategy/Progress Chart. As the strategy reaches its conclusion on the Progress Chart, the teacher has a serious decision to make. First, should the strategy be extended, providing the goal has not been reached? Second, should the Progress Chart be considered as a realistic time to allow the strategy to be successful and a new strategy be selected? If the predetermined time for the Progress Chart passes and no satisfactory progress is

observed, the teacher might assume that either the strategy is not a successful one with this particular child at this particular time, or that the time allowed for the strategy was an unrealistic one. A predetermined amount of time should be allotted for each strategy. This will enable the teacher to maintain close contact with each child and his/her progress toward selected goal achievement.

As might be assumed, this procedural approach requires thought and critical decision-making. The teacher must identify the child, compare the child's present position to selected goals in the classroom, generate child-specific goals (At this point we should remain open to the possibility that the culturally different child will have individualized goals that are different from the rest of the students in the class), design a strategy and Progress Chart for each child and each goal selected, and assess the child's advancement in relation to stated objectives and/or goals. A sample notebook entry for strategy and Progress Chart implementation follows:

Strategy/Progress Chart

STUDENT NAME Matthew Williams DATE 5-17-76

SELECTED OBJECTIVE (ONE) Cooperation with others in the classroom

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY Begin to incorporate a class meeting approach in class organizational design. Place Matt as 1 of 4 key figures to plan for meetings and eventually conduct proceedings. TIME FOR IMPLEMENTATION 1 Month

OBSERVATION (DATE AND COMMENTS) 5-24-76 Matt worked to only a small degree with the planning group. He was not a leader by any means and was a bit reluctant to participate. This is very new for him.

OBSERVATION (DATE AND COMMENTS) 5-31-76 The first meeting went well and Matt seemed pleased. This week he took a much more active part in the planning session. He is still unsure of himself with the group.

OBSERVATION (DATE AND COMMENTS) 6-8-76 Matt moved a little too fast with his ideas and behavior. The other 3 students rejected his suggestions. He really felt bad and withdrew from verbal participation.

OBSERVATION (DATE AND COMMENTS) 6-15-76 Matt is playing a more cautious role in listening and speaking in the planning group. The students seem to accept him but not his behavior. His behavior does seem to be changing.

A procedural approach such as this will lessen the probability of failure because concentration on specific objectives and strategies, generated with a specific student in mind, increases the likelihood of realistic evaluation. It should be remembered that every negative experience (e.g., academic failure and social isolation) that a culturally different child has in school makes positive progress less likely.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT CHILD

There are several types of activities which are good strategies for helping pupils who are culturally different. These activities will center around the use of language because it is language usage which often acts as the "roadblock" to learning for this individual. However, before any discussion of specific activities can be of value, a warning must be noted. If language enrichment activities can be successful, the learning environment must have

the desired cultural balance. As Moffett and Wagner (1976) suggested, the culturally different child will learn better in a school environment populated by both other culturally different pupils as well as pupils from the middle-class strata. Also, classes within schools which are "so-called" ability grouped may be very good for the college bound student, but this organizational structure tends to lead to an accumulated deficit for pupils in the low ability groups. That is, the culturally different become more deprived each year, due in part to their isolation which helps to ingrain the restricted language code. Optimum advantages will be gained when the following strategies are used in multi-cultural classrooms.

A major strategy for working with the culturally different pupil is the language experience approach to teaching the total language arts. This approach capitalizes on the use of children's oral language as a basis for teaching listening, writing, and reading. Moreover, this approach is functional for both remedial secondary as well as kindergarten instruction. Many good books are available for reference by the interested reader (See Allen, 1976 and Stauffer, 1970).

Another important strategy is that of peer tutoring. Elementary students can tutor age mates as well as younger pupils; therefore, such a program can be set up either on a classroom or school wide basis. High school study halls and homeroom periods (which have for a long time been problem spots for secondary faculties) can be organized into peer tutoring sessions which involve many students who have traditionally had no constructive activities during these times.

The use of group work and group projects can be very productive if the pupils are grouped across cultural lines. All pupils, regardless of their ages

can benefit from working with their peers in group situations. Pupils learn from one another in ways which were not possible before such new avenues of communication were opened.

Culturally different pupils benefit greatly from a variety of oral language/listenting activities; these can include work with equipment such as tape players and language masters. It is most important that these children hear their own language played back to compare with the teachers' and other pupils' if they are to immulate and internalize the language of the middle-class. Culturally different pupils should have one-to-one conversations with the teacher whenever possible during the learning experiences. This aids in thinking and concept development.

The culturally different also need many real life experiences (field trips, etc.). When such experiences are impossible, good vicarious experiences (e.g., films and pictures) should be used in abundance. This will help the culturally different pupil deal with the world in a manner more like the middle-class child.

The culturally different pupil, like all pupils, needs the opportunity to deal with things in the concrete before he can deal with abstract constructs. However, due to certain constraints in his social life which often lead to slower mental development, the culturally different child may need concrete materials several years longer than his middle-class age mates. Therefore, subjects such as mathematics should be taught using a wealth of concrete resources.

These are a few of the strategies which seem most successful with the culturally different. The list is not complete, but it should be obvious that a definite trend has been illustrated. Activities should be pupil-centered allowing for verbal interchange in a multi-cultural setting. The teacher simply

cannot be successful through the use of teacher-centered activities geared to learning abstract concepts in the traditional manner. Also, notice that the use (or even worse the memorization) of complex language and grammar rules is not suggested. The culturally different child needs to be immersed in language; he needs to learn language like a toddler learns language, not like an adult learns a foreign language. Asking such a child to master complex rules for sentence construction and punctuation is much like asking someone to run before they crawl.

SUMMARY

To be successful when working with the culturally different child the classroom teacher must be a clinician, diagnostician, as well as a conveyer of knowledge. Rewards will not come easy nor perhaps consistently. Nevertheless, educators at all levels must realize that positive results are possible. The culturally different individual is unique and very special in and of his own right. He is not of the middle-class and should not be judged by standards which originate from that level. This is not to say that low standards should be thought of as appropriate. The culturally different child can learn, act, react, judge, and carry on abstract thought just as any other individual. His learning style is his own, however, and should be considered as not only different but legitimate.

The program identified here with accompanying suggestions can be a successful one if properly applied. Change can be slow in coming and much effort may be required initially on the part of the teacher before desired outcomes are identified. While this could very well be the case, the design is sound both theoretically and practically. Those teachers truly dedicated to reaching the culturally different student may find it just what is needed.

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